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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an ethnographic study of the Oyster Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., a successful two-way Spanish-English bilingual elementary school designed to produce biliterate and bicultural students. The study was based on classroom observations, interviews of students, teachers, and administrators, and an examination of school documents. From the Oyster School perspective, the educational problems that language minority students face are due to discrimination by mainstream American education and society. A major goal of the Oyster program is to provide a setting whereby language minority students can maintain their native language and culture and achieve academically. The program functions as a language plan within an identity plan that aims to provide equal educational opportunities to its linguistically and culturally diverse student population. (MDM)

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Language planning and identity planning: An emergent understanding

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This paper demonstrates how an ethnographic approach provides a principled means of studying the way in which one successful two-way Spanish-English bilingual elementary school has organized itself so that its language minority students can participate and achieve in school. First, I describe the ethnographic approach that enabled me to understand the schools perspective on their program, which sees discrimination as the problem for language minority students in mainstream U.S. schools and society, and their program as the solution to that problem. Then, I summarize the local theory of identity planning that emerged from my analysis.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how an ethnographic approach provides a principled means of studying the way in which one successful two-way Spanish-English bilingual public elementary (pre-K-6) school program functions in its particular sociopolitical context. Oyster Bilingual School was selected as the research site because it is considered successful with its linguistically and culturally diverse student population by a variety of measures including standardized test scores and on-going performance-based assessment. It is also considered a model bilingual program by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA). Given inconclusive findings with respect to bilingual education's effectiveness in providing equal education opportunities to 'Limited English Proficient' ('LEP') students (Fasold, 1984; Weinstein, 1987), the related problem of speakers of nonstandard varieties of English being blocked from equal participation opportunities in mainstream classrooms (e.g., Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983), and the increasing problem of minority students' poor academic achievement in U.S. schools (Cummins, 1989), there is an urgent need to understand how successful schools organize themselves so that their diverse student populations can participate and achieve in school.

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A primary goal of my ethnographic study was to develop an insider's understanding of how the Oyster bilingual program was implemented so that its language minority students were achieving. In terms first introduced by Pike ([1954], cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1987), I attempted to gain an *emic* understanding of the cultural knowledge that participants have and how they use that knowledge in their interactions at school.

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However, since I began my ethnographic study of the Oyster bilingual program as an outsider, my preliminary definitions and categorizations of meaning world be considered *etic*, i.e. based on concepts, frameworks, and categories used in social science research (Pike [1954], cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1987). In order for my description of Oyster's success with its linguistically and culturally diverse student population to be applied to further social science theory refinement and development, I present an *etic* discussion of the local theory of identity planning that emerged from my *emic* analysis. According to Hymes, "these three moments (the etic-1, emic, and etic-2 of Pike, 1954) are fundamental to linguistics and anthropology" (1990:421).

Understanding Oyster's Success: An Ethnographic Approach

Although the presentation of how I obtained an understanding of Oyster's official policy, classroom level implementation, individual perspectives on the program's success, and the relevant context is necessarily linear, the cyclical nature of data collection and analysis involved in the ethnographic inquiry process needs to be emphasized. Each new piece of data contributes to an understanding of all of the data and continually encourages the researcher to reconsider or refine previous interpretations. Discrepancies in interpretations (for example between ideal policy statements and the researcher's observations of actual practices or, for example, between Oyster participants' representations of the same event they had witnessed) suggest directions for further research. Coherence in interpretations in a variety of data (for example by numerous teachers, administrators, policy makers, and parents who see Oyster as an alternative to mainstream U.S. educational and societal discrimination against language minority students) contribute to the validity of that interpretation and help to rule out rival interpretations. The cyclical nature of data collection and analysis that organized my inquiry process, as well as the dynamic nature of language planning and implementation at Oyster Bilingual School is then illustrated in the diagram presented at the end of this section.

The goal of my study was to describe Oyster's two-way bilingual education language plan and classroom level implementation in order to understand how it enabled its LEP students in particular, and language minority students in general to participate and achieve. The following description of the Oyster Bilingual Program states:

> Oyster's Bilingual Program has been in operation since 1971. It is considered unique in the city and the country. The teaming of English-dominant and Spanish-dominant teachers provides language models for students in both their first and second languages.
>
> Students hear and respond to both languages throughout the day. A final average of instruction is approximately half and half for each language, each

> day. Students read in both languages every day. Mathematics and content area groups are developed by the teaching teams. Often key vocabulary may be introduced in both languages.
>
> The end result of instruction at Oyster is the development of students who are biliterate and bicultural and who have learned all subject areas in both languages (*1988 Teachers' Handbook*: 1).

Interviews with policy makers, administrators, and teachers supplemented my understanding of Oyster's official bilingual education language policy. The official policy emphasizes equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English throughout the students' educational experience at Oyster so that the students become bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English. To accomplish these goals, there are two teachers in each classroom: one is Spanish dominant who ideally speaks and is spoken to only in Spanish, and the other teacher is English dominant who ideally speaks and is spoken to only in English. These team-teachers are responsible for dividing up the content area instruction so that all students receive instruction in language arts in Spanish and in English every day, and that approximately 50% of their instruction per day, week, and year in the rest of the content areas is in Spanish and 50% in English.

Since teachers have a great deal of autonomy in how they implement any educational plan, it is important to look beyond the official policy to actual classroom implementation. To understand how the plan is implemented on the classroom level, I worked as a participant observer for the first year of my study in the sixth-grade class. Sixth grade is the students' last year at Oyster, and provided an excellent opportunity to investigate the immediate outcomes of the program. Volunteering my services as an ESL and writing tutor allowed me to work with all of the students in the class and both of the teachers in a variety of ways. For example, I worked with each student individually on compositions (Spanish and English) on a regular basis, which provided one means of assessing their written and spoken proficiency in both languages as well as their academic achievement. Since the class was regularly organized into small groups who would work together on an activity or project, I had the opportunity to observe how the students negotiated with each other through Spanish and English to solve problems. When the teachers identified students who had problems with particular skills, I would work with the students either individually or in small groups, which enabled me to understand the teacher's assessment of students who needed extra attention and why.

When I wasn't working with the students or teachers, I observed, taped, and transcribed the classroom discourse. Consistent with ethnography of communication research (Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 1989). I organized my observations and analyses of speech events within the classroom interaction using Hymes' **SPEAKING** heuristic

(1974). By directing attention to details of the classroom cultural communication system, an ethnography of communication approach forces the researcher to "to make the familiar strange, to notice that which is taken for granted either by the researcher or the participants, to assume that that which seems commonplace is nonetheless extraordinary, and to question why it exists or takes place as its does, or why something else does not" (Erickson [1973], cited in Wilcox, 1982: 258).

Limiting my observations to the sixth grade as representative of the school, however, would not have been valid. I therefore spent one semester as a participant-observer in one of the kindergarten classes, which gave me the opportunity to study an early period in the students' educational experience. As in the sixth grade described above, I worked and talked with all of the students and both of the teachers in a variety of ways. I observed, taped, transcribed and analyzed the classroom interaction using an ethnography of communication approach. My experience as a participant observer in the sixth-grade class and in one of the kindergarten classes enabled me to make explicit the underlying norms of interaction and interpretation that structure the curriculum content and classroom interaction (Freeman, forthcoming). To determine if the patterns I had observed in these classes were representative of those throughout the school, I also observed, taped, transcribed and analyzed Pre-K, 1st, 3rd, and 5th-grade classes. As is to be expected, there was considerable surface variation across classes in the particulars of how the two-way bilingual education language plan was implemented. However, as I describe below, the underlying assumptions and expectations about minority language use and participation rights were consistent throughout the school.

To counter criticism about the authority of the ethnographer in representing a culture, as well as about the possibility of there being one objective truth to represent, many contemporary anthropologists suggest including the voices of the various participants in an effort to represent their interpretation of the culture (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988). In order to understand how the Oyster program is viewed and constructed by its participants, I interviewed policy makers, administrators, teachers, and students in a variety of ways throughout my two-year study. The interview technique that I adopted for my preliminary interviews combined qualities of life-history and of focused interviews, and could be characterized more as conversations than as standard interviews.[1] Although I would enter each interview situation with questions I wanted to have answered (e.g., Why did you get involved in a bilingual program? What is your philosophy of teaching? In your opinion, what makes this program successful?), I wouldn't necessarily follow the questions in any set order because the answers that the interviewee provided continually informed the evolving conversation. By the end of the interview/conversation, I would find

that most, if not all, of my questions had been explored. In addition, because I would try to follow topics that the interviewee raised, I inevitably collected data that I wouldn't have thought to ask about, and which often turned out to be the most instructive.

It is important to emphasize the need for researchers to not only include the participants' voices, but also to listen carefully to what those voices have to say about what is going on in their cultural context and why. From my experience, it can be very difficult to move from the etic-1 to emic level of analysis because of the naturalizing effect of ideology. That is, ideology functions to make us see things as natural, common-sense, true, or simply the way things are.[2] In my case, prior to doing research in the Oyster Bilingual School, I had conducted research in two transitional bilingual programs, and had supervised English as a Second Language (ESL) student teachers in a variety of public school programs. Implicit in these programs, as well as in the Bilingual Education Act that supports them, is the notion that limited English proficiency is the problem for students defined as LEP. ESL instruction, and if possible instruction in the native language until the student has acquired enough English to participate in the all-English content area classes, is the solution to this language problem. Because of my experience seeing limited English proficiency as the problem and ESL/native language instruction as the solution, I initially focused my observations and questions on the distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English throughout the school. One day a teacher told me, "you know, it's much **more** than language." To understand this teacher's simple statement, I was forced to look more critically at the Oyster bilingual program. Reviewing my data in an effort to understand what "**more** than language" was involved, ultimately led to my emergent understanding of the underlying identity plan that I argue explains the program's success.

In addition to the open-ended interviews described above, follow-up interviews/conversations were conducted; these included questions similar to those described by Mishler as characteristic of 'focused interviews' (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, cited in Mishler, 1986). For example, I would regularly ask a variety of individuals (individually and/or in groups) who had all participated in or witnessed the same event to tell me what had happened. In this way I could compare multiple representations and evaluations of the same event. Including various participants' interpretations provides layers of meaning that the researcher alone could not provide. In Geertz's terms, exploring "webs of interrelationships" among these layers of meaning helps the ethnographer provide a "thick description" of the culture under study (1973).

With respect to my role in the interview process, I assumed that I was an active participant, jointly constructing meaning with the interviewee. I did not pretend to be a neutral interviewer who was simply collecting information. Rather, in talking with teachers

and administrators about the Oyster program, I would make my personal background and interest as a teacher explicit. In talking with students, I would explain that I was also a student, and that I wanted to learn about their bilingual program. In all of the interviews, I attempted to position myself as a learner, and all of my interviewees seemed to take on the role of my teachers.

The Oyster Perspective

The following excerpts from some of the interviews illustrate a very different construction of the problem for LEP students in U.S. public schools than I had originally assumed. From the Oyster perspective, the problem for language minority students in general (including LEP students, speakers of languages other than English, and speakers of varieties other than standard English) is mainstream U.S. educational and societal discrimination against minority languages and minority peoples. It is important to emphasize that Oyster locates the problem not in the student, but in mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse. This very different construction of the problem requires a very different solution. Oyster has therefore organized itself to provide an alternative educational discourse in which minority languages and students are, ideally, not discriminated against.

For example, one of the co-founders of the Oyster Bilingual Program, Señor Estevez related his understanding of "the big problem in the United States":

> the big problem in the United States...years back...that is not related to bilingual education...it is related to the acquisition of any other language than English...I just want to tell you two things...first of all...a problem of immigrants...they have to find the identification of being an American in the dominance of a language and your allegiance...your patriotism...years back...not well founded...was the sooner that I forget the old country...the more American I am

In this account, Señor Estevez makes explicit his assumption that immigrants feel obligated to abandon their native language and culture in order to achieve in the United States and his negative evaluation of this assumption.

Administrators and teachers provided numerous personal experience stories that were consistent with Señor Estevez's definition of "the big problem." For example, Señora Ortega, the principal of the school during the first year of my study, provided the following account of her experience as a native Spanish-speaking Mexican-American child educated in a monolingual English public school in the southwest United States:

> as a child...and I'm talking about personal experience...one of the problems I had was that I never felt good about my race because it was never talked about...my name...I was so embarrassed...I remember...because no one could say /eléna/...I was always called /ilína/../élɔna/...or /élɔn/...and I

> always felt like they all knew that the teacher was pronouncing it wrong...so I was so embarrassed all the time...I hated my name for years...and it wasn't until I grew older that I started saying...well there's nothing wrong...and I actually started going back to my culture

The sixth-grade Spanish dominant teacher, Señor Xoci, is also a Mexican American who was educated in monolingual English schools in the southwest. He provided the following account of his experience:

> I came back to my roots when everything else had fallen apart...you start looking around for something to hold onto...and then you realize who you are...and you finally get a grip...this is where I come from...this is where I tie back into...so you sort of go back into it

In both of these personal accounts, returning to the previously abandoned cultural identity is positively evaluated. This implies these educators' negative evaluation of language minority student's abandoning the native language and cultural identity.

A major goal of the Oyster bilingual program is to provide an alternative to such discriminatory practices for language minority students so that the students can maintain their native language and culture and achieve academically. A paper describing the history and politics of Oyster Bilingual School written and presented by Oyster parents summed up this goal as follows:

> The Director of EDC [Educational Development Center] pushed hard for integrated two-way bilingual education involving English and Spanish speakers. She felt that transitional bilingual education had isolated Hispanic students. In DC [Washington, D.C.] the philosophy placed emphasis on maintaining language and culture (National Association for Bilingual Education conference: 1980).

Señora Ortega' described the outcome of this alternative educational experience for language minority students as follows:

> you see what I'm saying...they're being prepared for something that is making them a better human being...it's amazing...as opposed to this discrimination and bigotry when they're out there

The repetition of these same themes by policy makers, administrators, parents, and teachers made it clear that Oyster sees itself as providing much more than language instruction to its LEP students. Oyster represents itself as providing an alternative to mainstream U.S. educational and societal discriminatory practices that had either been witnessed or experienced personally.

To summarize the Oyster perspective, mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse locates the problem for LEP students in the students themselves. In this discourse world, the native language and culture is seen as a problem to be overcome, and as a handicap to full participation opportunities.The solution to this problem is for the LEP

student, like all language minority students, to assimilate to monolingualism in standard English and to white middle-class norms of interaction and interpretation in order to participate and achieve in school. If the individual does not assimilate to majority ways of speaking and interacting, he/she is a labeled a failure by the institution. There is a growing body of ethnography of communication research to support this perspective (e.g., Michaels, 1981; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983; Scarcella, 1992).

Oyster, in contrast, locates the problem for language minority students in mainstream U.S. educational and societal discursive practices–not in the student. Oyster therefore sees itself as providing an alternative to mainstream discourse with respect to minority language use and participation rights. Rather than requiring language minority students to assimilate to language majority ways in order to achieve, the Oyster educational discourse encourages additive bilingualism in Spanish and English for all students and cultural pluralism. This alternative educational discourse ideally provides language minority students a third option: maintain and develop the native language and culture, acquire standard English, and participate and achieve without being discriminated against.[3]

Oyster's representation of itself as one linguistically and culturally diverse "community" that expects additive bilingualism and cultural pluralism as the norm is central to understanding how their program functions within its particular sociopolitical context. Evidence for Oyster's inclusive notion of community can easily be found. According to administrators and policy makers, the program originally began as a grass-roots community effort involving local politicians and parents. The parent organization is referred to as the "Community Council," and is very active in all aspects of school management from raising funds for resource teachers to participating in the hiring of the principal. Parents, whether members of the Community Council or not, are expected to and do volunteer their services throughout the school on a regular basis. The students wear t-shirts that say "Oyster Community Bilingual School." One parent told me, "You know, the great thing about this school is it's like a community that crosses language, cultural, and class lines."

This constructed notion of comembership in the Oyster community is important to emphasize. As Erickson and Schultz point out in their discussion of comembership in counselor/student interactions, "attributes of status such as ethnicity or social class do not fully predict the potential comembership resources" (1982:17). In the case of the Oyster school, the common goal of educating the children is the attribute that ties these individuals from diverse backgrounds into a community which they recognize and explicitly refer to. In other words, the Oyster community has chosen to define themselves as one, rather than as several communities that are often in conflict with each other in U.S. mainstream society.

Understanding the Oyster perspective of their program and of mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse was crucial to my analysis of the micro-level classroom interaction. It is important, however, to look beyond what the participants explicitly state about their practices. As Bourdieu warns,

> ...the informant's discourse, in which he strives to give himself the appearance of symbolic mastery of his practice, tends to draw attention to the most remarkable 'moves', i.e., those most esteemed or reprehended in the different social games rather than to the principle from which these moves and all equally possible moves can be generated, and which, belonging to the universe of the undisputed, most often remain in their implicit state (1977:18-19).

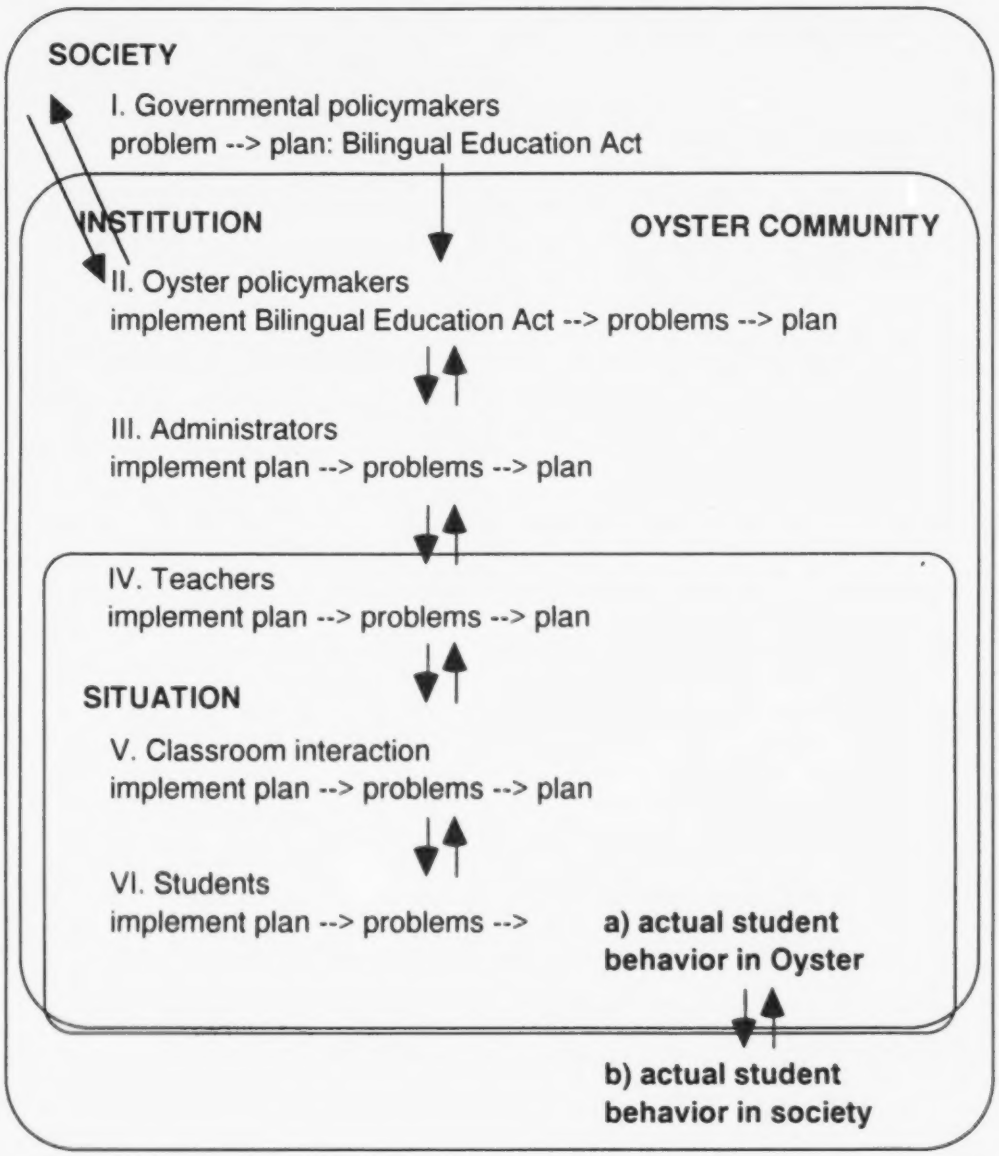
For this reason, triangulation of a wide variety of data is essential to the ethnographic inquiry process. In addition to the interviews/conversations and my own classroom observations described above, I collected articles about the program in which someone else interviewed the Oyster participants, pamphlets the school published for conferences they held at Oyster to illustrate their bilingual model in action, copies of presentations that the parents gave at a conference about the program, observations and transcripts of teacher and parent-teacher meetings, samples of student work, etc.

While I collected a wide variety of data to analyze representations of minority language use and participation rights in Oyster Bilingual School as compared to mainstream U.S. schools and society, this study is not exhaustive; the goal was to describe the bilingual education language plan and implementation from as many directions as possible. The identification of patterns that are repeated throughout the discourse (student, teacher, classroom, administrator, parent, and policy statements) work together to make one explanation plausible and to rule out rival hypotheses. The consistency of the Oyster representations of mainstream U.S. school and societal discourse as discriminatory against minority languages and peoples, and of Oyster as successful because it provides an alternative for language minority and majority students alike, contributes to the validity of the interpretation.

This brings us to the question of what the relevant context is. As the discussion above makes clear, the observed classroom practices needed to be located in relation to the underlying Oyster educational discourse and in relation to the mainstream U.S. societal discourse. Figure 1 (below) reflects interrelationships between the situational (classroom), institutional (Oyster school), and societal levels of context, as well as the multiple levels of planning and implementation within Oyster. This framework provided a means of organizing the data collection and analysis, which required movement between levels with analysis of each distinct level continually informing and refining analysis of the others. As

the diagram illustrates, one level's plans inevitably present new problems for the next level as attempts are made to implement those plans, which in turn require new plans.

Figure 1: Dynamic interrelationships between Oyster plan and implementation on various planning levels.



The unidirectional arrow from Level I: Governmental policy makers to Level II: Oyster policy makers illustrates that the law, the Bilingual Education Act, was handed down to schools that have LEP students. It is the school's responsibility to determine how

to best implement the law within their context based on several factors (e. g., numbers of LEP students, from which language backgrounds, availability of trained bilingual educators, etc.). There is little dialogue between the societal and institutional levels of context with respect to language planning. The Oyster institutional culture is represented as the intermediate level in the diagram. Because the individuals who constitute Oyster explicitly refer to themselves as one community, I labeled that level "The Oyster Community." The bidirectional arrows at the upper left-hand side of the diagram illustrate the fact that the educational discourse that constitutes Oyster does not exist in isolation. All of the individuals within the Oyster community regularly interact with mainstream U.S. societal discourse with its distinct and often competing assumptions about minority language use and participation rights.

The bidirectional arrows between Level II:Policy makers, Level III:Administrators, Level IV:Teachers, Level V:Classroom interaction, and Level VI:Students illustrate that there is dialogue concerning the plan, implementation, and outcomes within Oyster. The changes that the lower level makes in order to be able to implement the higher level's plan ideally are fed back to the higher level in the form of problems that require new plans. The greatest amount and most complex interaction occurs at the situational level between Level IV:Teachers, Level V:Classroom interaction, and Level VI:Students. As described above, the majority of my efforts focused on gaining an understanding of the dynamics within these levels and relating them to the upper planning and implementation levels; that is to relate the micro-level situational context to the macro-level institutional and societal contexts.

In sum, the ethnographic inquiry process enabled me to understand the Oyster perspective on their program's success, including its relationship to mainstream educational and societal discourse. Since the Oyster construction of the problem for language minority students is very different from the mainstream U.S. construction of that problem, Oyster's solution is necessarily very different from the mainstream solution. Rather than requiring the language minority student to fit into mainstream U.S. discourse, Oyster has created an alternative educational discourse in which minority languages and identities have the right to participate. I turn now to the local theory of identity planning that emerged from my analysis.

Language Planning and Identity Planning for Social Change

The Oyster bilingual education program can best be understood as a language plan within an identity plan that aims to provide equal educational opportunities to its linguistically and culturally diverse student population by socializing its language minority

and language majority students into seeing themselves and each other as equal. In order to understand the possibility of Oyster as a social identity project, it is necessary to turn briefly to work on social identity development.

My work is based on the assumption that identity is co-constructed through interaction (Harre, 1984; Davies & Harre, 1990; Ochs, 1993). Davies and Harre (1990) emphasize the constitutive force of language in identity development. If an individual is repeatedly positioned as a particular kind of social being in the micro-level interaction, over time the individual assumes that role with its associated rights and obligations in the social order. Relating this to minority students in schools, it is possible to understand how minority and majority identities are developed relative to each other and to the school by analyzing minority and majority identity display in the classroom discourse over time.[4] Significantly, recognizing the constitutive nature of discourse allows the possibility of an individual refusing a discourse that positions him/her negatively. It then becomes possible for the individual to reposition him/herself favorably in a newly constructed discourse (Davies & Harre, 1990). This theoretical notion of refusing a discourse and reconstructing an alternative in which the individual is positioned more favorably is relevant to my discussion on two levels.

First, it explains how the Oyster planners (policy makers, administrators, teachers) collectively recognized discriminatory practices against language minority students in mainstream U.S. educational discourse, refused that discourse, and collectively constructed the Oyster alternative educational discourse with its goal of socializing its students differently. More specifically, Oyster refuses to see languages other than English as problems to be overcome; they refuse to require assimilation to monolingualism in standard English; they refuse to teach a Eurocentric curriculum that excludes, marginalizes, or stereotypes minority contributions; they refuse to use standardized tests as the sole means of assessing student performance; and they refuse to require all students to behave and interpret behavior solely according to white middle-class norms because Oyster recognizes these mainstream U.S. educational practices as discriminatory, and as contributing to the perpetuation of the subordinate minority role in mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse. Instead, Oyster positions its language minority students as equal to its language majority students within the linguistically and culturally diverse Oyster 'community' by 1) encouraging them to maintain and develop their native language, culture, and identity in an integrated two-way Spanish-English bilingual education program; 2) including their histories, arts, literatures, experiences, etc. as a focal point in the multicultural curriculum content; 3) assessing their performance through a variety of measures aimed to see what

these students can do; and, 4) expecting, tolerating, and respecting diversity within the Oyster community as the way it is.

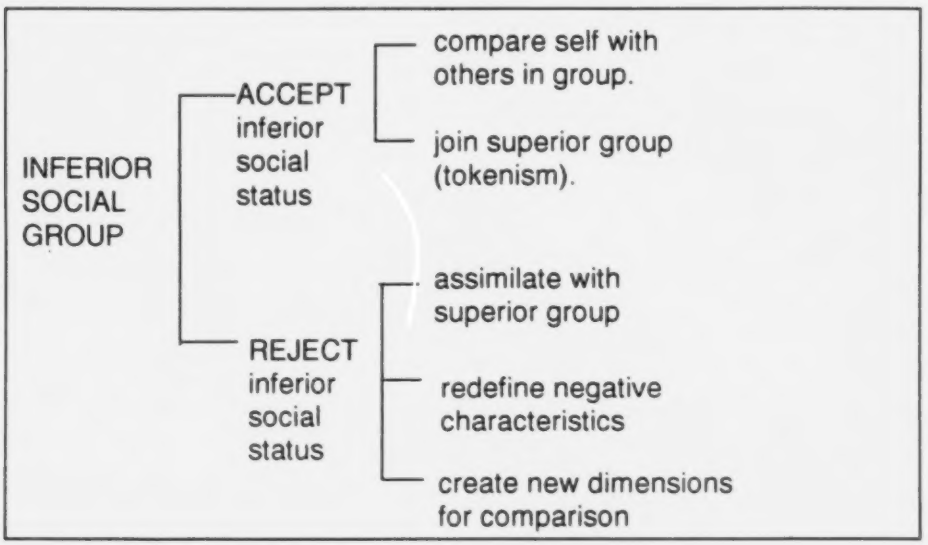
The emphasis on positioning language minority students as equal to language majority students is present in every aspect of the Oyster bilingual program and classroom practices. The students are socialized through the Oyster educational discourse to see additive bilingualism in Spanish and English as the norm, and to see themselves and each other as equally legitimate participants who all have strengths and who can all achieve in school. Such an educational discourse ideally provides language minority students with opportunities to develop positively evaluated minority social identities who have the abilities and the rights to participate and achieve in school without being forced to assimilate.

However, the students do not spend all of their lives in the Oyster alternative educational discourse. Therefore, a second part of the Oyster agenda can be understood as attempting to teach the students to recognize discriminatory practices in which members of minority groups are positioned negatively, to refuse that positioning, and to reposition those individuals more favorably. For example, by presenting multiple perspectives on a historical event rather than only presenting a Eurocentric perspective, students are encouraged to think critically about what they see and hear. By asking students to relate to the characters they read about in the various courses they study, to describe how they would have felt if they had been treated the way one character treated another, to describe what they would have done differently if they had been in a certain position, etc., students are provided with opportunities to recognize and refuse discriminatory practices, and to suggest creative alternatives. This agenda has different implications for minority and majority students. The minority student ideally learns to recognize discriminatory practices in which he or she as an individual is positioned negatively, and strategies to reposition him- or herself more favorably. The majority student ideally learns to recognize discriminatory practices against other individuals, and learns strategies to refuse contributing to the perpetuation of such practices.

Up to this point, I have concentrated on what the individual can do to change his or her negative positioning and social role. In order for social change to take place with the effect of constructing a societal discourse in which people are treated more or less equally regardless of their background (consistent with the Civil Rights Act of 1964), collective action is required. I refer to Tajfel's theory of social change (1974, cited in Coates 1986) in order to explain options available to groups who have an inferior social status. I present this discussion in order to contextualize the strategy that Oyster has selected in their effort to change society so that minority populations have equal participation opportunities.

Figure 2 below illustrates how members of an inferior social group can either accept or reject their inferior position in society.

Figure 2: Tajfel's theory of inter-group relations and social change.
Source: Coates (1986:9)


INFERIOR SOCIAL GROUP
ACCEPT inferior social status
compare self with others in group.
join superior group (tokenism).
REJECT inferior social status
assimilate with superior group
redefine negative characteristics
create new dimensions for comparison

If the inferior social group accepts their inferior social status, members of the social group will try to achieve self-esteem and a positive self-image by operating as individuals, not as a group. In this case, the individuals have two strategies available to them. One option is to measure their successes solely against others within their social group and not compare themselves to members of the superior status group. This is the case, for example, when minority groups remain segregated from the dominant group and compare themselves only to those within that segregated group. A problem with this strategy is that although the minority group members may have self-esteem and a related positive social identity within that limited group, they are not afforded equal opportunities within the society as a whole. A second option is for the individual to attempt to join the superior group, and possibly be accepted as a token. This strategy, however, can present the individual with a very difficult situation because the individual may never be completely accepted by the dominant group, and, having abandoned the minority group, may never be completely part of that group either.

If, on the other hand, the members of the inferior social group refuse to accept their inferior social status as fair, they can, as a group, attempt to change things. According to Tajfel (1974, cited in Coates 1986), there are three ways to accomplish this; these strategies

usually occur historically in the order presented. The first strategy is to try to demand equality with the dominant group by assimilating to that group's norms. This is clearly the strategy that mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse encourages. In order for language minority students to obtain equal educational opportunities in U.S. public schools, they need to acquire standard English and white middle-class norms of interaction and interpretation. Under this strategy, the characteristics associated with the inferior social group are considered handicaps to full participation. Therefore, members of Spanish speaking groups, for example, tend to abandon the Spanish language and norms of interaction and interpretation associated with their particular Spanish speaking group because they learn that standard English and white middle-class norms are the keys to success in mainstream United States institutions. If the individual Spanish speaker, for example, does not assimilate, he or she as an *individual* is labeled a failure by the institution.

However, there is an increasing number of students who come from other than standard English speaking white middle-class backgrounds, and these individuals drop out of U.S. public schools at a disproportionately high rate (Cummins, 1989). In addition, as many of the personal experience narratives I collected at Oyster illustrate, the minority students' perception of forced assimilation can have negative consequences for personal identity development. It is arguable that this assimilation strategy, as currently practiced, is not accomplishing its goal of providing equal educational opportunities to all students.

The second option available to minority social groups who refuse to accept the negative minority status is to redefine negative characteristics. At Oyster, as opposed to the mainstream U.S. educational discourse definition of Spanish as less prestigious than English, Spanish is redefined as equal to English. This effort is evidence by the policy of equal distribution of Spanish and English within the curriculum content and classroom interaction, illustrating to the students that Spanish is 'good enough' to fulfill the educational function. In addition, the curriculum content is not Eurocentric but includes the histories, arts, literatures, scientific contributions, etc. of the various populations represented in the school; this illustrates to the students that all these groups are legitimate and provides them with multiple perspectives on any one event. In sum, efforts to redefine bilingualism and cultural pluralism as positive qualities are present in every aspect of the curriculum design and implementation.

With respect to the third strategy of creating new dimensions for comparison, a primary goal of the Oyster program is the development of positively evaluated minority identities: from the Oyster perspective, such positive minority social identities have not been readily available within the discriminatory United States society. Oyster, therefore,

makes a collective effort to socialize the minority and majority children alike into recognizing the existence of positive minority identities whose differences are expected, tolerated, and respected within the educational discourse. Oyster's two-way bilingual education model, an inclusive non-Eurocentric curriculum content, performance-based assessment, team-teaching, and cooperative learning help fulfill these goals.[5]

It seems reasonable to believe that if people from minority groups collectively and continually refuse negative positioning in the interaction; and if people from majority groups become aware of the discriminatory practices that prevail in societal discourse, eventually people (minority and majority alike) will slowly change to expect more or less equal participation opportunities, regardless of background. Given schools' roles in socializing the students into understanding their social identities relative to the school and society, the schools can be considered a rich ground for social change. By the schools' recognition of discriminatory practices prevalent in mainstream society and by its creation of an alternative educational discourse, it is possible to redefine students' roles and rights of speaking through positioning, thus making possible social change from the bottom up. This, at least, seems to be the goal of what I refer to as the "Oyster identity plan."[6]

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to illustrate how an ethnographic approach provides a principled means of studying how the successful Oyster bilingual program functions in its sociopolitical context. In conclusion, I briefly comment on the generalizability of my findings to other educational contexts, and on the value of ethnography as a tool for educational research and policy development.

The particulars of Oyster's successful program, that is, equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English throughout the students' educational experience, are the least generalizable to other settings. However, as Watson-Gegeo writes,

> a carefully done emic analysis precedes and forms the basis for etic extensions that allow for cross-cultural or cross-setting comparisons....The ethnographer first seeks to build a theory of the setting under study, then to extrapolate or generalize from that setting or situation to others studied in a similar way. The comparison must be built on careful emic work, and it must be recognized that direct comparison of the details of two or more settings is usually not possible. Comparison is possible at a more abstract level, however (1988:540-541).

It is at the more abstract level of identity planning that my findings are potentially generalizable.

An understanding of implications of educational programs and practices for students' identity development and display relative to each other is an essential starting

point in identity planning projects. This requires careful attention to how students are positioned relative to each other in the face-to-face interaction over time. an ethnography of communication approach can provide such an understanding.

Once the researcher/practitioner identifies negative implications for particular identity groups, for example, LEP, women, African American, etc., the next step in identity planning is to refuse that discourse and construct an alternative discourse in which the individual/group is positioned more favorably. This point cannot be underestimated. Recognizing the constitutive nature of discourse means that we have choices in the language we use in our interactions with each other. As the research shows, the Oyster educators refuse the construction of language minority students' ways of speaking and interacting as the problem blocking their equal educational opportunities. Instead, the Oyster educational discourse constructs mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse as the problem, so the solution requires changing not the students but the educational discourse. Their strategy involves redefining negative characteristics as positive–for example, defining Spanish as equal to English–and defining languages other than standard English and cultural norms other than white middle class as resources to be maintained and developed. In addition, their strategy includes creating new dimensions for comparison, for example, two-way bilingual education, an inclusive curriculum content, team-teaching, cooperative learning, and performance-based assessment. While Oyster's measures are not appropriate everywhere, other strategies that focus on the inclusion and positive evaluation of minority languages and identities can be created to meet the needs of other socio-political contexts.

This last point is important to emphasize. Researchers/practitioners must consider how alternative educational programs and practices would function in context. In this sense, ethnography provides a powerful tool for education, not only to research effects of existing policies and practices, but to consider implications of future policy decisions. Without an understanding of the cultural context that a plan is intended for, it is possible that the plan will be ineffective, or worse, that it may have outcomes other than those originally intended.

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[1] See Mishler (1986) for discussion of alternative approaches to research interviewing.

[2] See Fairclough (1989) for discussion.

[3] See Freeman (forthcoming) for further discussion.

[4] See Carbaugh (1990) for discussion of how to analyze identity display.

[5] See Freeman (unpublished dissertation) for numerous examples, and detailed analysis and discussion.

[6] It is important to emphasize that Oyster does not exist in a sociopolitical vacuum and all the participants interact with mainstream society on a regular basis. My ethnographic/discourse analytic study illustrates how the tension between Oyster's alternative educational discourse and mainstream educational discourse with respect to language usage, participation rights, and relative social identity explains systematic discrepancies between ideal policy and actual implementation.

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